



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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News Release

WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO SELLING IDENTITIES FOLLOWING ICE INVESTIGATION

ICE identifies this criminal offense as an increasing trend in Arkansas

HOT SPRINGS, Ark.—An investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) ultimately led to an Arkadelphia, Ark., woman pleading guilty in U. S. District Court here to three counts of selling genuine U. S. birth certificates and Social Security cards.

Maria Moreno pleaded guilty Feb. 14 to one count of selling five or more identification documents, one count of possessing another person's Social Security card, and one count of possessing a Social Security card with intent to sell. Five other counts alleged in the grand jury indictment were dismissed in the plea agreement. Ms. Moreno's sentencing date is pending.

Moreno was arrested Dec. 9 at her home in Arkadelphia, Ark., by ICE special agents after informants purchased five sets of genuine U.S. birth certificates and matching Social Security cards for \$780 per set. The documents Moreno sold were those of real United States citizens.

ICE special agents executed a search warrant on Moreno's home which turned up additional U.S. birth certificates and Social Security cards; another \$12,815 in U. S. currency was also found hidden throughout the house. A subsequent search of Moreno's safe deposit box at a local bank yielded an additional \$47,450 in cash. The money was seized as suspected proceeds of Moreno's unlawful activities.

Moreno is a former long-time employee of Petit Jean Poultry in Arkadelphia where she worked at times in the personnel office. Moreno left her employment at Petit Jean in 2003.

This arrest and conviction are the culmination of a yearlong identity-theft and alien-smuggling investigation by ICE special agents from the Texarkana, Ark., office of investigations. Special agents of the Social Security Administration in Little Rock, Ark., assisted ICE in the investigation. ICE considers Moreno to have been one of the major document vendors in this area of Arkansas.

“Illegal aliens are increasingly using stolen U.S. citizen identities in this area of Arkansas,” said Craig Griffin, resident agent-in-charge of the ICE Texarkana office. “They now want to buy genuine U.S. birth certificates and Social Security cards from document vendors like Moreno, and are then able to apply for genuine drivers licenses and identification cards. Our ICE agents partner with many law enforcement organizations to find and arrest such document vendors.”

ICE is working closely with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Western District of Arkansas, Hot Springs Division, to prosecute both the buyers and sellers of documents in these schemes. The Fort Smith, Ark., U.S. Attorneys Office prosecuted the case.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.